

Challenges of Public Policy Making and Execution in Nigeria

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Abstract

Public policy formulation and execution are central to any country's rate of development. In Nigeria, the problem is essentially of execution and continuity. Successive governments abandon inherited public policies and initiate theirs that their own successors equally abandon, thus leaving a trail of abandoned policies and their relevant projects. There is a big dis-connect between the policy makers and those for whom the policies are made, resulting in lack of ownership and acceptance of the policies by the people. The result is a near directionless growth. A survey approach was employed while highlighting the policy actors and the public policy process in Nigeria. Some of the factors militating against effective policy making and execution in Nigeria were found to include political rascality, ethnicity, lack of need assessments, corruption, too many points of agenda, inability to properly identify problems, lack of continuity, lack of political will, inadequate resources, white elephant or unrealistic policy goals, among many others. The consequences of poor public policy formulation and execution were equally highlighted. This paper therefore, x-rays the causes of the malaise and attempts proffering solutions that will help stem the tide. It, therefore, concluded that for the country to get its development drive right it must pay more attention to receiving inputs from all the policy making actors in and outside government as well as encourage continuity regarding good policies, regardless of tenure of administrations. This is more so given the fact that Nigeria is still struggling with rudimentary development in all facets, even after about sixty years of political independence from her colonial masters, Britain.

Keywords: Public policy, policy formulation, policy execution

Introduction

The success of any political system lies in the nature and manner of public policy making and execution process employed. Policy as an

instrument of government affects the lives of each person in a state, as it occupies a key position in the success of every administration, whether public, private or not-for-profit making organization.

Public policies are policies and programmes meant to handle particular social problems emanating from the environment (political system). Public policy deals with present and future problems of a society and involves all legitimate means of achieving stated goals and objectives of government, rendering social services to the community by a governmental agency or ministerial department. In a developing country like Nigeria, public policy is very critical since it is the spring-board for channeling development. Public policy is pivotal to translating government intentions to practical actions. This usually involves huge amounts of resources and the need for them to address intended use or issues can never be over-emphasized. However, in Nigeria, the problem is not policy formulation but that of diligent execution of the policies. More often than not public policies are easily made but the issue of proper implementation remains a great question to be answered in the country (Arowolo & Egugbo, 2010).

In Nigeria, the process of policy formulation and execution has been highly politicized. Thus, public policy making in Nigeria is characterized by a multiplicity of governments and governmental agencies, involved in potentially over-lapping and conflicting policy making activities. The complexity of policy making in a federal set up such as ours becomes even more compounded when the system operates in a democratic setting. According to Abdulsalami (in Yakubu & Obasi, 1998) “In such a situation, several of the governments in the Federation may come under the control of different political parties, each with its ideological inclinations and political preferences and values which in turn influence or even determine their developmental objectives and priorities”, invariably neglecting the opinions and views of the masses.

Therefore, policy actions can also originate from the citizenry even as they must have government backing to be appropriately called public policies. Some authors also argue that there is a gap between the policy formulators and the people for whom the policies are intended. This has often led to policy failures.

Conceptual Explanations

Policy

Policy, as a concept, has attracted various explanations. Google sees it as a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual. In this wise, Ikelegbe (2006) and others, agreed that some emphasize policy as an action. In this category is Ezeani (2006), who said it is the proposed course of action which government intends to implement in

respect of a given problem or situation confronting it. Others see it as choice involving multiplicity of options from which the choice is made. Yet, some see it in terms of scope of action. Abdulsalami (in Yakubu & Obasi, 1998), said that a policy refers to hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring government action for their solution. For Dye (1995) it is about why governments do what they do and the difference between what they do and what they fail to do.

Public Policy

The term public policy has several connotations depending on the context within which it is used and also the person defining it. It is important to state here that, even though there are various definitions of what public policy is, these definitions help us to know the boundaries of public policy rather than conflicting definitions. Though some definitions limit the conception of public policy to what government actually do, others defined it as the intentions of government. Yet some definitions include not only the actions of government but also the inactions of governments (Lasswell and Kaplan, 1970; Sharkansky, 1970; Lowi, 1972; Dror, 1973; Jenkins, 1978; Gordon, 1986; Starling, 1988; Dye, 2004).

Public policy is usually designed to affect a particular targeted population in a geopolitically defined entity. This position is in line with the definition put forward by Dye (2004), that it is whatever government chooses to do or not to do. The implication of this definition is that the citizenry could make demands on the political system (government) on the establishment of industries, but it is the decision of government to either accede to the demand of the citizens or ignore such. .

Public policy has objectives which tell us what we want to achieve with policy and who will be affected by policy. Public policy plans or programs outline the process or the necessary steps to achieve the policy objectives. They tell us how to do it. Dimock, *et al* (1983) argued that it involves prioritizing objectives and choosing the substantive measures to deal with them as well as providing explanation for such choices.

Ikelegbe (2006) posited that public policy "is a course of action and a programme of actions which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems." What this implies is that, policy actors have several alternatives from which they choose. The actors could be the government, private organizations or individuals. Public policy is aimed at solving a particular problem. Hence, we can say that public policy "is an action or inaction taken or not to be taken by government, private organizations or individuals" (Arowolo and Egugbo, 2010).

Public Policy Characteristics

Public policy has so many characteristics that make it to be unique. Dror (1973) while wisely conceptualizing policy as a guide for action, identifies the following key characteristic of a policy as follows:

- A choice: it is an important choice or a critical or major decision taken by individuals, groups or organizations. This means that there has to be several policy alternatives.
- Policies are proposed courses of actions or projected set of decisions: Policies are prospective or are statements of future actions. Policies state what is going to be done or would be done. It outlines a course of contemplated or desired action in relation to certain desired objects or events in the real world.
- A policy is goal-oriented: It is directed at the attainment of certain end states, or more simply, objectives. A policy has certain purposes or intentions.
- Policies have to do with particular problems or problem area: They are not abstracts, but rather relate to and are actually responses to the challenges and pressures arising from an environment. In fact, often times, policies are designed and targeted at dissolving existing or future problems or satisfying certain needs.
- Action: It involves action that requires flexibility in order to cope with changing desires of the people, shaped in consonance with their socio-cultural environment.

To these Ikelegbe (1994) added that it is a course setting action which *provides the direction, the guide and the way to the achievement of certain goals. It provides the frame within which present and future actions are taken.*

From the characteristics of public policy as seen above, one can rightly observe that in most instances, government involves itself in guesswork in the course of trying to formulate certain policies. This could be true because often times governments take decision without empirical data or scientific tools before arriving at certain policy-decisions.

Policy Execution

Execution is the most important stage in public policy making process. It is at this point that policy either fails or succeeds. It is the process of converting human and material inputs, including informational, technical, human, demand and supports into outputs in the form of goods and services (Erninue, 2009). Akindele *et al* (2006) hold that policy implementation is what happens once a law is passed. The implementation process consists of a series of governmental decisions and actions that attempt to turn already determined mandates into reality. This process involves the outputs of public policy, such

as the funding or actual service being delivered. This definition implies that, for there to be effective policy implementation, viable administrative structures must be put in place and there must be political will on the part of the government in power.

Execution or implementation stage in the public policy process is very crucial. This is the point where the intentions of the designers of the policies are often undermined by a constitution of powerful forces of politics and administration. The analysis and assessment of the implementation process is a pre-requisite for a successful public policy execution or implementation.

Ikelegbe (2006) observes that implementation involves the committal of funds, the establishment of structures and methods, the hiring of personnel, the administering or executing of activities, and the security of policy goals, services, and other intended outcomes. It involves conversion of human as well as material inputs to realize goods and services.

According to Erninue (2009), policy implementation process is interminably linked by three key concepts: tension, institutionalization and feedback.

- **Tension:** A new policy, which aims at transforming an unpalatable situation into a desired or qualitatively superior state of affairs, necessarily generates tension within and between administrative implementing organizations, the target groups and the environment. For instance, tension may arise within an administrative implementing organization whose personnel lack the necessary skills or following a hostile reaction or reception from the target audience for implementing a policy. The management of its tension will therefore determine the degree of success of policy implementation.
- **Institutionalization:** The implementation of a new policy is usually expected to lead to institutionalization (thus raising questions regarding the survival of such institutions).
- **Feedback:** In the process of actually implementing a new policy, tensions generated could be fed back to the implementation process in the form of new demands which are subsequently processed and transformed into some policies that, in turn, have to be implemented - a process which made Adamolekun (1983) to conclude that "the formulation and implementation of policies are not completely distinct phases of activity." For effective implementation of policies, Anderson (2006) has succinctly delineated processes and has also outlined the internal and external influences that condition policy implementation.

Public Policy Actors In Nigeria

The actors in policy making process, according to Ikelegbe (1996), include:

- Governmental Actors - the Legislative; the Executive; the Judiciary; and the Bureaucracy
- Non-Governmental Actors – Political Parties; Pressure/Interest Group; Mass Media, the Citizens among others.

The Legislature: This is a body of representatives of the people. The representatives aggregate the demands of those that they represent and bring same to bear on the direction of government.

The Executive: The executive initiates as well as galvanizes the demands emanating from the legislature into policies. Articulation, formulation and execution of public policies are in the domain of the executive. In a democracy the executive lobbies the legislature to accommodate preferred policy items in the annual budgets.

The Judiciary: Through the constitutionally assigned powers of judicial review the judiciary can examine and determine the constitutionality of legislature, executive and bureaucratic actions and policies. The roles of adjudication, interpretation and review present the judiciary as key actor in policy formulation and execution or implementation.

The Bureaucracy: This is the engine room of any government. It comprises the civil and public services and they provide the needed expertise, skill and competence for public policy formulation and execution in the polity.

Political Parties: Political parties champion the interest of their members. Interests of political parties, especially when they are in power, are usually aggregated and translated into public policies. During electioneering campaigns they make promises which they often try to actualize through policies they enact and pursue. The electorate usually judges the ruling political parties by their ability or inability to follow their campaign promises with concrete policies to address such promises.

Interest Groups: Commonality of interests brings people together and they tend to pursue such interests. Interest groups differ from political parties in that they do not seek to form governments. They only exist to make demands on the government with a view to addressing their peculiar challenges. They exert a lot of influence on the policy process.

The Citizenry: Payment of taxes and levies, obedience to laws and performance of civic duties are responsibilities of the citizens. They can freely perform these or with-hold their compliance, depending on their acceptance or rejection of the government policies. That way, governments try to carry them along in public policy formulation and execution, at least to avoid distractive protests capable of even providing environment for rival forces to topple existing governments.

Public Policy Making And Execution In Nigeria

Following the amalgamation of the north and south protectorates in 1914 by the British governor general, Lord Fredrick Lugard, Nigeria came into existence. However, it was not until 1960 that Nigeria became an independent country. Through the years policies have not been in short supply. What has been lacking is adequate execution of relevant policies. Those that are initiated by a regime are often quickly aborted by successive governments that feel their predecessors will take the credit for good policies that they inherit and complete or pursue.

In a developing country like Nigeria, public policy is very critical since it is the spring-board for channeling development. It is very clear from records that Nigeria over the years has initiated well- articulated developmental, economic and social policies, intended to launch the country on the path of meaningful national development. However, more often than not, public policies are easily made but the issue of proper implementation remains a great question to be answered.

Certainly, in Nigeria, implementation is generally a function of administration and politics in co-operation with the people (citizenry). But the problems, according to Ezeani (2006),

are that little attention is given to the subject of policy implementation by policy decision makers in Nigeria. There is *a disconnection of the masses in* policy formulation and implementation in *Nigeria*, and this has caused *the* country a very serious problem that policy miscarriage or abortion is always reoccurring. *Consequently*, this has caused untold hardship on the citizenry since service delivery has been in the shape of comatose.

The stratum nature of the society, Adamolekun (1983) contended,

has also worsened the situation because of differential in class struggle among the elites themselves. Today in Nigeria, the differential is hinged on inter and intra-party rivalry, ethnicity, religion, regionalism among others. There has been a missing-link between the elites who are policy makers and the masses that are at the receiving end of any poorly formulated and implemented policy.

Furthermore, in Nigeria, the masses (public) are hardly consulted and mobilized with proper education on public policies. Their inputs are scarcely respected through consultative and mass participatory governance. Policy continuity is a challenge even with the high frequency of change in administrations. Scrapping of past policies by incumbent governments has become a norm or tradition in Nigeria. There is no nexus connecting former

policies to present ones. This unhealthy state of politics in policy making and execution in Nigeria remains detrimental to her developmental drive. For instance, Greene Eleagu (2019) observed that in the agriculture sector alone, there were no fewer than seven policies between 1976 and 2001 addressing the same issue of poverty alleviation or eradication. These policies were only renamed in most cases.

They included Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976, Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) in 1977, Green Revolution in 1980. Others include the establishment of the People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Development Bank (CDB), Nigeria Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), among others. However, many of these programmes failed because of corruption, lack of continuity, improper implementation, poor supervision, etc. (Okoye and Onyeukwu, 2007, Quoted in Eleagu, 2019).

Factors Militating Against Effective Policy Execution in Nigeria

There are factors militating against effective policy making and implementation in Nigeria. These factors include:

- Political rascality
- Ethnicity
- Lack of need assessments
- Corruption
- Religion
- Too many points of agenda
- Inability to properly identify problems
- Lack of continuity
- Lack of political will
- Inadequate resources
- White elephant or unrealistic policy goals.
- Lack of clarity in policy definition
- Weak democratic values and institutions
- Lack of good governance
- Lack of popular commitment
- Lack of input from the people
- Paucity of data
- Policy instability
- Lack of thoroughness in policy execution

Problems Of Public Policy Failure In Nigeria

The unhealthy nature and manner of policy making and implementation in Nigeria have led to the failure of many policies in actualizing their predetermined goals and targets. Policy failure gives birth to so many catastrophic consequences. Samson & Stanley (2014) identified some of these consequences to include:

1. **Underdevelopment:** Any country that is underdeveloped cannot feed her citizens neither provide jobs for all. When citizens are well to do they will in turn be productive in the country by contributing their quota to its growth and development. What the country gives her citizens shows to a large extent the state of her development. Suffice to say that the state of any economy directly reflects in the life style of her citizens.
2. **Less patriotism by citizens:** These days a lot of persons are no longer interested in the things that happen in Nigeria due to lots of failure in policy implementation.
3. **Non-improvement on human capital:** Public policies, besides solving the problems of the people, are also meant to improve on the human resources of the society. It is human capital that is the fulcrum and lever of nations. Public policy failures hinder the development and improvement of human capital.
4. **Waste of resources:** Public policy failures are waste of human and materials resources that were put into it during and after formulation. The entire process of public policies is no mean task. If the policies fail to achieve its desired results, then the colossal human and material resources put in from formulation to the implementation stages are wasted. The resources could have been devoted to other areas which need more attention in the country. It is the people's resources or commonwealth that are used in making and implementing policies.

Measures to Improve Public Policy Execution in Nigeria

- **Target Beneficiaries:** It can be said that no single government policy plan is sufficient to meet the needs of the people. It is good to target a specific group for a better policy implementation. The target group should be involved at the formulation stage in order for them to contribute in what affect(s) their lives. This will also give them a sense of belonging and commitment.
- **Interaction and Communication between Government and the other Organizations:** Adequate attention should be given the non-governmental organizations, professional bodies, organized private sector and the civil society groups in the policy process.

- **Monitoring of Project:** There should be provision for adequate monitoring of projects, to stop the problem of abandoned projects and to ensure the realization of policy goals.
- **Adequate Resources:** Adequate material and human resources needed to implement the policy should be provided.
- **Effective Communication:** There must be effective communication between the target beneficiaries and the implementers of policy programs.
- **Encourage the Culture of Continuity:** The culture of discontinuity of policies should be discouraged. The national and state assemblies should enact laws that will guarantee continuity of policies made to enhance growth and development. There should be continuity in policy, except when the policy is found not to be useful to the people.
- **Substantial Effort and Continuity of Efforts:** Policy implementation will not automatically follow from policy decisions but needs to be treated as a positive purposive process in it. Consequently, substantial effort is required to follow policy from intention to action; and the resources needed for adequate implementation of relevant policies needs to be provided to realize policy objectives.

Conclusion

Nigeria's challenge is more of policy execution than of policy formulation. This situation is caused by many factors among which are conflicting interests and so policies need to be properly formulated and must as well be properly monitored so as to avoid failures (Samson & Stanley, 2014). This is because success of any government or administration depends largely on formulation and execution of good public policies. Therefore, for public policy formulation and implementation in the country to be successful, we need to look at public policy as an issue which concerns not only the elite but also the masses in order to fill the gaps or missing-links in the structure of public policy formulation and execution in Nigeria.

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